

Theme: Faith in Exile – I Peter 1:17-19

Title: The People of God in Exile – Jeremiah 29:1-14

Aim: Establish that we who are in Christ are in exile.

Intro: When I was in Israel last spring, I was there by the blessing & grace of God. I was there because of the gift of the NLC, which decided to send a pastor a year along w/BICS; there because of BICS – they take their class every year; there w/blessing of family – all happy for me; there w/the blessing of this church, which graciously gave me the time. I'm very thankful I had that opportunity of a lifetime but I was glad when the time came to come home – until I couldn't come home! As you know, 9 of us tested positive for Covid & we couldn't fly out (tested the evening we were scheduled to leave, luggage already on the bus). We had to stay an additional week. We were well taken care of, able to get out for walks, had nice rooms, good meals – but at that point I was there by no choice of my own. I was in exile. That may sound extreme, but it was more about where I wasn't than where I was. I wasn't home where I expected to be. What if I tested positive again (a couple of days later we did test positive again)? What if I was the only one who tested positive again? One lesson God taught me is that there are indeed things that happen which are beyond one's control. In such situations, trust God & pray for others in such situations. My situation was not life threatening, but not what I wanted at that time. Well, said all that to say this: we who are Christians, who are in Christ, are, in the words of the author of Hebrews (11:13), "strangers & exiles on the earth." Theme for 2023 (who would have thunk it?): Faith in Exile. How is it that we are in exile? What does it mean to be in exile? What is God's purpose? What is God doing? What does God want me to do in exile? How do/should we live in exile? The theme passage is I Peter 1:17-19, which we'll only read today & delve into in weeks to come [READ]. The text which may lay a foundation of this theme for us is Jeremiah 29:1-

14 [READ]. Jeremiah tells us that these verses of Scripture are part of a letter sent from Jeremiah to those who were exiles in Babylon & especially to the leaders among them. He tells us when the letter was sent – “after King Jeconiah” (& others) had been taken “into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.” Jeconiah was taken to Babylon in 598 BC, so that’s when the letter was written. Once before, in 605 BC, captives were taken to Babylon, & yet more would be taken into exile in subsequent years. It should be noted, 1st of all, that **Exile is from God**. David Gudzik wrote that “the Jewish people were in exile by the will of God.” The people of Judah weren’t longing to go to Babylon. They didn’t decide to go there. They didn’t make a major life choice – “Let’s move to Babylon.” Rather, their captivity was a result of their rebellion against God. They had forsaken God & were worshipping idols. They were under God’s judgment & discipline. Just as God raised up the Jews for His purposes – to bring the Messiah to the world, so He made them His people & called them to follow His way & keep His standard. However they did not follow or obey throughout the centuries, so He sent them into exile using Babylon to discipline them (simplified version). They were exiles in a foreign land. In a similar but somewhat different way, all Christians in this world, from the time of the early Church until today, are exiles in a country/world not our own. “Wait,” you say, “what do you mean I’m an exile? I was born here in the USA, & have lived here all my life (not necessarily true for everyone). I’m an American citizen, a taxpayer & flag waver. How can I be an exile?” Simply put, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “our citizenship is in heaven.” This world is not our home. The new earth kingdom will be ours, but this present world is not ours. It does not belong to us & we do not belong to it, though we live here now, while time exists. Jesus even said, “The world has hated Me & it will hate you.” That’s been true throughout history in many ways & is becoming more & more

clearly true in today's world, even in the USA. We are exiles by the will of God. We are here in the USA & other believers in the world are in their respective countries by the will of God, for His purposes. Not as discipline, but for His purposes. In all our varied ethnicities & statuses God has placed us where He wants us, again, for His purposes. But we are exiles – strangers & aliens – in this world. That's important to realize, lest we become too tied to this world, lest we become absorbed by the world & become ineffective in the world. It's also important to realize, 2ndly, that **there was/is an appointed end to the exile**. For the Jews, it was 70 years. Some count those 70 years from 605 BC, when the nobility of Judah was taken captive, to 536 BC & the return of the 1st exiles. Others count it from 586 to 516 BC or from the burning of the temple in Jerusalem to the finished reconstruction. I think that is most likely but there are other possibilities also. God had plans to restore Israel, to bless His people. He had a future in mind. He gave them hope. Of course that hope centered on more than just a restored country or restored capitol or restored temple. That hope & God's plan centered on the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, whose birth we celebrated last Sunday. For us, the appointed end of our exile will be when Jesus comes again – His 2nd advent. For the Church it's been over 2000 years since Jesus' 1st advent, His life on earth, His death on our behalf, His resurrection in triumph over sin & death & His ascension into heaven to the Father's right hand. But Jesus promised that He is coming again & He will gather together His Church/Bride & we will be w/Him forever. He is coming to make all things whole again, all things new. When He comes, He will usher in the fullness of peace on earth. God has plans for us – plans for welfare. Life here is hard at best, but it's not yet what it will be. God has a future in mind for us, His children, His Church – eternal life w/Him, in His new earth kingdom. We have a sure hope in Christ. I like the way Gudzik puts it: "God thinks toward His children."

His thoughts toward us are of peace (wholeness), not evil. There's much unrest in this world & in our hearts now, but Jesus said, "Come to Me...& I will give you rest" (Mt.11:28). Wholeness awaits us. And God's thoughts toward us are of a future & a hope. In this world we eke out a living & struggle w/life's trials, day by day – one day at a time. We do hope for better today than we had yesterday (& we here in America have it so much better than we realize). But God is for us, not against us & He will carry us to the end of our exile in the appointed time. He will gather us from all the nations. Let your lives be filled w/hope in Christ. Next week & in the weeks & months ahead we'll consider how we are to live as exiles. It begins w/faith. We'll look at some examples & the exhortation of the apostles. But today let us come to grips w/the thought that we are exiles in this world. Jesus is coming when the exile will be over, but until then we live as exiles, we look to God, we hope in Him & we give ourselves to His work. Faith in exile is what our lives are about.